

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for maintaining patency of a vessel or other region of a human or animal body, the apparatus comprising:

an appliance comprising a body portion and end portions spaced apart by the body portion,

the appliance being structured to take on a deployed configuration when located within the vessel or other body region, such that the end portions are spaced apart from each other by other than the body portion, the end portions overlap each other, or the end portions directly contact each other, and

the appliance being further structured to exert a force on the vessel or other body region, when the appliance is in the deployed configuration within the vessel or other body region, in order to maintain the region substantially open or unobstructed, or to cause the region to be maintained substantially open or unobstructed.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the appliance is structured to form a relatively flat configuration.

3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the appliance is configured and structured to be submucosally implanted into the vessel or other body region defines a substantially flat oblong configuration when in other than the deployed configuration.

4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the appliance comprises a super-elastic material.

5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the appliance comprises Nitinol.

6. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the end portions are radiused.

7. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the appliance has a length defined between the end portions, and the appliance comprises a plurality of struts extending along a substantial portion of the length.

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8. The apparatus of claim 7 wherein said plurality of struts comprise a super-elastic material.

9. The apparatus of claim 7 wherein said plurality of  
10 struts comprise Nitinol.

10. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the appliance comprises at least about 2 struts structured to be spaced apart from one another when implanted in the vessel or other  
15 body region.

11. The apparatus of claim 10 wherein the struts are sized and structured to be submucosally implanted in a vessel.

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12. The apparatus of any of claim 11 wherein struts are sized and structured to be implanted in the vessel such that the struts are aligned along a longitudinal axis defined by the vessel.

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13. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the appliance comprises a cuff-shaped member having an outer peripheral portion defining an interior space.

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14. A method for maintaining patency or causing to become patent, open or unobstructed, a body region of a human or an animal, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a flat or pre-curved member having a body portion and end portions spaced apart by the body portion;

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pulling end portions of the flat or pre-curved member together to form a folded configuration;

holding or temporarily securing the end portions

together;

placing the member in the folded configuration, into a body region to be treated; and

5 releasing the end portions from being held or secured together, thereby allowing the member to expand within the body region.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the expanded member within the vessel or other body region is effective to  
10 provide a substantially constant radial force against the walls or tissues of the body region.

16. A method for maintaining patency or causing to become patent, open or unobstructed, a vessel of a human or  
15 animal, the method comprising the steps of:

providing at least one elongated member having a desired stiffness and resiliency,

implanting the elongated member submucosally into walls of the vessel in alignment with a longitudinal axis.

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17. The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of

providing another one of said at least one elongated member;

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implanting the another one of said at least one elongated member submucosally into the vessel in alignment with and spaced apart from the at least one elongated member, in order to provide support to the vessel.

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